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COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

HEALTH

ENERGY

OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS

COMMITTEE ON RULES

COMMITTEE ON BUDGET

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

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January 5, 2022

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.
Chairman
Energy and Commerce Committee
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Pallone:

The Energy and Commerce Committee has a long history of rapidly responding to public health emergencies within its jurisdiction, so I am disappointed with the complacent nature and lack of haste to which this committee has responded to the new COVID-19 variant. With the increasing uncertainty of the Omicron COVID-19 variant, I urge you to hold a hearing with the COVID-19 policy leaders in our federal agencies so we may learn how Congress can better address our nation's response to this variant. It has been nearly two years since the first case of COVID-19 was reported in the United States, yet we still find ourselves in the same pattern of response. It is our duty as authorizers to conduct oversight of federal response activities for this virus. Surely, ways to improve our response have been identified, and we must have robust and bipartisan discussions in order to learn where these changes must be made, especially as the Biden Administration releases redundant details of its plan to fight the Omicron variant, which could be more effective.

While I am grateful for the hope and protection the COVID-19 vaccines have provided, over 70% of the nation has received at least one dose. It is unrealistic to expect every citizen to participate in the inoculation of this vaccine. We must look for ways to pivot and broaden our response from vaccines only, to a more holistic approach, such as by providing additional options through therapeutics, and ways to increase manufacturing of the therapeutics for which we already have access.

The Health and Oversight Energy and Commerce Subcommittees held valuable hearings earlier this year to learn about the process of developing, manufacturing, and providing access to the COVID-19 vaccines. It would be beneficial to invite various agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Food and Drug Administration, and the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority to testify on the development process for COVID-19 therapeutics and antivirals, such as molnupiravir and sotrovimab, and how we can ensure adequate distribution of these options.

For instance, it has come to my attention that due to its expected effectiveness against the Omicron variant, shipments of the monoclonal antibody therapeutic sotrovimab were paused to ensure reserves would not be depleted as the variant becomes more prevalent. Though this decision has since been reversed, I am very concerned about the limited supply currently available. Questions must be asked regarding how to increase supply, and whether our health agencies worked to ensure an adequate supply would be available prior to an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) being granted- similar to what occurred with the COVID-19 vaccines.

The White House released its plan for combating the Omicron variant, yet I fear that not enough of an emphasis has been placed on finding alternatives to the vaccine. Additionally, as we have learned from the first two years of the pandemic, lockdowns have been detrimental to our economy as well as the mental health of American citizens. We must be diligent, quick, and careful as we craft a response for the Omicron variant, and the response must include safe alternatives to combat this disease. While we must continue to encourage Americans to have discussions with their health care providers on receiving the vaccine, we cannot continue to divide our nation and politicize our response. Options must be made available, and proper attention must be devoted to guaranteeing these alternative options.

Our nation's journey in addressing this virus is, unfortunately, far from being finished. It is imperative that we continue robust and fluid involvement with our health agencies' so we can be prepared and assist in the response efforts as practically and efficiently as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Michael C. Burgess". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michael" and last name "Burgess" clearly legible.

Michael C. Burgess, M.D.
Member of Congress